interesting issue is not whether and how Japan was like Europe, but the surprisingly numerous ways in which it resembled China. This is an area in which a student of comparative material cultures could make an out-standing contribution.

Hanley also remains tied to the same argument she made in 1977 regarding the prevalence of infanticide in the Japan and its role in slowing population growth. She is still convinced that fertility rates must have been significantly higher than the population registers show; therefore people must have been limiting the size of their families. Furthermore, this was done deliberately, not only through delaying age of marriage but also through abortion and infanticide. The aim was to improve the family's standard of living by eliminating those children who could not contribute to its economic well being over the long run. Yet disaggregating population levels by region shows that the considerable growth in western Japan has been masked by population declines in Tohoku as well as near cities (a point Hanley herself concedes). In an article too recent for Hanley to have incorporated it into her book, Laurel L. Cornell demonstrates that the assumptions demographers have made regarding maximum fertility rates are much too high for premodern societies.[2] Some years ago Ann Jannetta pointed out that smallpox, endemic during the Tokugawa period, can reduce male fertility by up to 50 percent.[3] Since smallpox is on the point of eradication world wide, using fertility rates in contemporary populations where it is presumably not present as a standard for measuring growth in past centuries is problematic. Furthermore, social practices such as working away from home need to be taken into account. No one can argue that infanticide was unknown in Tokugawa Japan. Whether it was performed as systematically as Hanley implies with the intent to improve not a family's chances of survival but its standard of living is more debatable and adds little to the book's basic argument.

There are other points that might be raised regarding the role of social pressure in limiting family size. I found it unconvincing to state on page 39 and elsewhere that commoners easily circumvented sumptuary regulations regarding the size and furnishing of their dwellings (though no mention is made of the eaves, walls and gates that were the jealously guarded prerogative of the village elite and led to many a village dispute over status distinctions), yet on page 138 to argue that these same commoners accepted government regulation and social control when it came to the number of children they would raise. That implies that the Tokugawa system of governance was more effective in enforcing this social policy than present-day China. It can be argued, furthermore, that society frowned on large families only for those who could not afford them. Tokugawa Ienari (1773-1841) proudly had 55 children, and among the rural entrepreneurs of the Ina valley, raising seven, ten, or eleven children was not uncommon. Demographic studies need to take social status and well as economic class into account.

Given that this review is aimed at specialists of early modern Japan, I would like to pick at one nit regarding names. On page 86, Hanley refers to a Suzuki Makiyuki who wrote about the Nagano area in 1827. Having once made this same mistake myself, I assume she is referring to Suzuki Bokushi (1770-1842) whose ethnographic account of the snow country contains much information on material culture.[4] On page 113 she cites an article by Itô Kôichi, and then on page 119 another by Itô Yoshiichi. If I am not mistaken, they are one and the same person. With those exceptions and a typographical error or two, the book is remarkably well produced. It is compact and crammed with the kind of detail that can spice up a lecture. Because it is well written in easily accessible language, a more general audience might enjoy reading it for fun and profit.

A Book for Believers?

Lee Butler, Brigham Young University

Dominated as it has been by economic materialists, the study of Tokugawa history in postwar Japan has been surprisingly narrow--at least up until the last decade or so. The dramatic shift toward social history that occurred in postwar scholarship produced in and about the

[2] Laurel L. Cornell, "Infanticide in Early Modern Ja-pan? Demography, Culture and Population Growth," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 55.1 (February 1996): 22-50.

[3] Ann Bowman Jannetta, *Epidemics and Mortality in Early Modern Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), p. 189.

[4] Suzuki Bokushi, *Snow Country Tales: Life in the Oth-er Japan* trans. by Jeffrey Hunter with Rose Lesser (New York: Weatherhill, 1986); Anne Walthall, "Peri-pheries: Rural Culture in Tokugawa Japan" *Monu-menta Nipponica* 39.4 (Winter 1984): 371-392.

United States and Europe was unmatched in Japan. My experience as a research student at Tokyo University in the mid 80s appears to have been typical for the time. The graduate seminars and study groups I attended focused overwhelmingly on the economic factors that drive history. I can still recall extensive reading lists on two of these, Hideyoshi's cadastral surveys and the Bitchû hoe. What surprised me was the concentration on these at the exclusion of other issues.

Of course, work in other areas of Japanese history was being conducted. Intellectual history and religious history continued to be written, as were certain types of social history (much was carried out in terms of larger economic concerns, or merely as local history), and cultural history saw periods of vibrancy under scholars such as Nishiyama Matsunosuke and Hayashiya Tatsusaburô. But there is no denying the predominance of political and economic history. These were the fields where issues were most hotly contested and into which the best young scholars were encouraged to enter.

Not surprisingly, western scholarship on the Tokugawa era reflected this trend among Japanese scholars. While very few in the west shared the Japanese faith in interpretations of economic determinism, the subject of study was largely the same. Proponents of the modernization thesis did little to change this.

Recent years have seen a substantial weakening of the old paradigm within Japan. Younger scholars have begun to address issues that were considered lacking promise or simply irrelevant by older scholars. Several edited volumes on women and gender have appeared in the past decade, marginal groups in society have begun to attract attention, and new approaches to social and cultural studies have begun to appear. In the past, cultural studies tended to focus on individuals, "schools," and types. Interdisciplinary studies that addressed questions of power, politics, and society in the context of culture were rarely seen. Evidence of the shifts that have at last begun to occur in this area are apparent in the recently published twenty-one volume "comprehensive history" published by Iwanami Shoten (*Iwanami Kôza Nihon Tsûshi*, 1994-1995.) Included in the volumes on Tokugawa history are essays about "The Tools of Daily Life," "Warrior Residences," "The Formation of Regional Cultures," and "Characters (*moji*) and Women," among others. In contrast *Iwanami Kôza Nihon Rekishi* of 1975-77 included just two essays on cultural issues, one on *Genroku bunka* and the other on the performing arts among commoners.

Given this background, and the maturity of the field of Tokugawa historical studies in the west, we should not be surprised at the recent publication of works in English that are new in topic, approach, or methodology. To this group we can add Susan Hanley's *Everyday Things in Premodern Japan*, an analysis of material culture of the Tokugawa period.

Before addressing the Hanley volume, let me briefly describe material culture as defined by scholars of the United States. The term is commonly used in two ways. First, it describes objects of study, in other words those material items which are under investigation. Second, it describes a method or process. The following is a generally accepted definition of that process: "Material culture is the study through artifacts of the beliefs--values, ideas, attitudes, and assumptions--of a particular community or society at a given time."[1] To historians of material culture, artifacts are "expressive forms" which reflect the people and society that shaped them. All human-made artifacts are thus viable subjects of study. Included are fine art, residential architecture, household furnishings, city landscapes, tools and other artifacts of work, children's toys, and so on. As suggested by this list, students of material culture are not solely historians. In fact, historians came rather late to the field. Among the other disciplines represented in the study of material culture are art history, cultural anthropology, architectural history, and folklife studies. Regardless of the subject of study, however, one aspect of material culture studies seems constant, and that is the effort to make sense of a people's attitudes and behavior. Understanding culture, in short, is the ultimate goal.[2]

---

[1] Jules David Prown, "Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method," in *Material Life in America, 1600-1860*, Robert Blair St. George, ed., (Northeastern University Press, 1988), p. 18.

[2] Besides the Prown essay noted in the preceding footnote, useful discussions of the field of material culture, from which I have drawn, include the chapter by Thomas J. Schlereth, "Material Culture and Cultural Research," in *Material Culture, A Research Guide*, ed. Thomas J. Schlereth, (University of Kansas, 1985); and another essay by Schlereth, "Material Culture or Material Life? Discipline or Field? Theory or Method?" in Schlereth's collection of essays, *Cultural History and Material Culture: Everyday Life, Landscapes, Museums*, (UMI, 1990).

The stress on the culture of material culture runs through Schlereth's work and is repeated frequently by others. See for example Peirce F. Lewis's discussion of cultural meaning within landscapes in his "Axioms

Material culture offers new and tempting means to understand history. Although it seems excessive to claim as some do that artifacts are invariably truer sources than written ones, there is no denying the power of three-dimensional sources. Artifacts have the power to relay "nonverbal" understanding. For example, as a means of understanding merchant life in eighteenth- or nineteenth-century Kyoto there is no substitute for spending a day or week in a *machiya* or "city residence" dating from the era.

As Thomas Schlereth, the dean of American material culture studies, has noted, the field is not without its pitfalls. Just as with written sources, many objects of material culture have not survived the decades or centuries. And not all that have survived are readily verifiable as to time, owner, or significance. Other problems appear at the interpretation end: as tangible objects, artifacts have a tendency to overwhelm us, and we then have a tendency to exaggerate their importance. Part of the difficulty is that the material record is largely a record of successes. This of course was not the whole story. A related problem is what Schlereth describes as "progressive determinism," which "often sees the American past as one material success after another in an ever-upward ascent of increased goods and services for all the nation's citizens." Such a position was common among the "consensus" historians of the fifties and sixties, but has since been pushed aside for narrower, less grandiose studies.[3]

In *Everyday Things in Premodern Japan*, Susan Hanley sets out to make sense of the "physical well being" of the "average Japanese" during the Tokugawa era. Material culture sources are her evidence, and her contention is that physical well-being improved throughout the period, resulting in a populace that differed little in that regard from their European and American counterparts. In short, the Japanese people were well prepared to be the base upon which modern industrialization could take place.

Hanley begins by providing her own definition of material culture. She interprets it as "the physical objects that people use or consume in their everyday lives, most of which are either made or else natural objects put to use by people" (p. 12). Thus she includes not only artifacts shaped by human hands but natural ones as well. This suggests something that becomes increaseingly evident in the book: that the author is interested primarily in the material life of Japanese people not in their material culture, as it is commonly defined. There is little or no effort to understand why Tokugawa Japanese did as they did, what beliefs or attitudes were reflected in changing (or constant) patterns of material culture, or how narrower questions of social class and mobility found expression in material culture.

So, how well does the author accomplish what she attempts? The book is divided into eight chapters, the first and last being introduction and conclusion. The inner chapters are entitled “Housing and Furnishings,” ”A Resource-Efficient Culture,” “A Healthful Lifestyle,” “Urban Sanitation and Physical Well-Being,” “Demographic Patterns and Well-Being,” and “Stability in Transition: From the Tokugawa Period to the Meiji Period.” Of these, I found those on housing and urban sanitation to be the most interesting and convincing. Both are subjects that have received the attention of Japanese scholars, allowing Hanley to draw upon their work. As the author notes, there is considerable evidence that housing did improve for many Japanese during the period, along with the amount of goods they consumed--or put in their warehouses. The only difficulty with the argument concerns questions of distribution and extent, matters to which existing evidence fails to speak. On urban sanitation, Hanley appears to stand on firmer ground, at least in her discussions of Edo. Previous work in English on the water supply of Edo and the disposal of its human waste suggests the importance of the subjects and the efficiency of the systems. It may indeed have been the case that in the late nineteenth century citizens of the largest cities in Japan enjoyed cleaner water and cleaner streets than did the citizens of London, Paris, and New York.

Despite their strengths, these two chapters exhibit a weakness that pervades the book: they cover a vast amount of time and territory in a limited number of pages, and are built upon thin evidence. While there is no question that the material culture of Tokugawa Japan has not been preserved as well as that of colonial America and the United States during corresponding centuries,

---

for Reading the Landscape: Some Guides to the American Scene," pp. 174-182, in *Material Culture Studies in America*, Thomas J. Schlereth, ed. (The American Association for State and Local History, 1982).

For an enlightening discussion of one scholar's experience with the field of material culture, and of its significance, see Roger Daniels, "The Reeducation of a Historian: Learning About Material Culture the Hard Way," *The History Teacher* 29:2 (February 1996), pp. 217-222.

[3] Schlereth, "Material Culture and Cultural Research," pp. 14-18.

surely more exists as evidence than what is referred to in this volume. This raises another issue. Choosing to argue that the physical well-being of the Japanese people as a whole improved during the Tokugawa era, Hanley is at pains to find evidence produced among lower classes in society. The difficulty is that the lower one reaches, the fewer the material sources. Just as with written sources, those individuals most likely to leave behind artifacts that survive centuries are of the middle and upper classes. Perhaps the evidence appears thin in this book because it is thin. In any event, the problem remains. Hanley's contentions are large while her evidence is small.

A similar difficulty of scale is apparent in the author's decision to direct her analysis toward the "average Japanese" (used for example on p. 43, and implied throughout the book). Just who or what was the "average Japanese"? Did social and economic distinctions not matter in this context? And what of regional distinctions? If in fact questions of material life were as generally uniform as Hanley suggests, we need evidence of that. As it stands, the author presents isolated examples, and in the process readily jumps from one region to another and from one social and economic class to another. Where those lines blur, as they no doubt did, the argument needs to reflect that.

The most problematic of the chapters is that which describes Tokugawa society as "A Resource-Efficient Culture." In every social and cultural habit of the Japanese, Hanley is able to find something that saved time or money or trees or energy or pain or lives. Some examples: 1) The lack of furnishings in Japanese homes was economical. It saved space and money. Even the wealthy enjoyed "luxury in austerity." Evidence of this extended to their culture as seen in the art of flower arranging, in which but one flower was used (pp. 56-59). 2) "In order to save on fuel, the Japanese developed methods of providing heat using the principle of heating the body rather than the air in the room." These included the hibachi, *anka* (a container for hot charcoal which could be placed within one's bedding), and the *kotatsu* (pp. 60-63). 3) Clothing, in the form of the *kosode*, saved cloth, since none was wasted regardless of the size of the wearer. Also, it didn't need ironing (pp. 68-71). 4) "The Japanese also invented a . . . resource-efficient type of towel, known as the *tenugui*." It was "just a rectangular piece of cloth," but could be used for everything from a washcloth to a handkerchief for wiping away perspiration to a rag (pp. 71-72). 5) Other things that saved resources: Straw footwear (True, it didn't last long, "but then, one didn't get bunions or corns from a bad fit" as with boots), a lack of shame about nakedness, tea cups without handles, wooden chopsticks (no waste of metals for spoons and forks), and loincloths (73-75).

To these I respond: What about all of the stuff bought and put in the warehouses? And what about the numerous kimono that many women owned? Even if their style of clothing required less cloth than western clothing, is this evidence that they actually consumed less? Is it possible that with their simple arrangements Japanese consumed more flowers than did westerners with their huge bouquets because the latter were only occasional items while the former were daily ones (an absurd question in response to an absurd statement)? As for saving fuel, while Japanese methods of heating may have been efficient, were the people physically better off by being cold? And what about the threat of fire? As is well known, these items that were efficient at producing small amounts of heat were also very effective at destroying cities. How do issues like this fit into the picture of "physical well-being"?

As should be apparent by now, this volume takes us back to the world and debates of the "modernization thesis." I admit that I stand on different ground than does the author. Where she remains committed to finding out that the overall conditions of life were improving for Japanese during the Tokugawa period, I am interested in the types of lives that the Japanese lived, the complexity of their society and beliefs, the cultures they created and shaped, and the meanings they brought to their existence. In the final analysis, *Everyday Things in Premodern Japan* is a book for believers, those who are already converted. For the rest of us, the material culture of Tokugawa Japan remains one of numerous rich fields that have just begun to be explored.